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PROSPECTIVE RED CROSS RURAL NURSING IN THE KENTUCKY MOUNTAINS

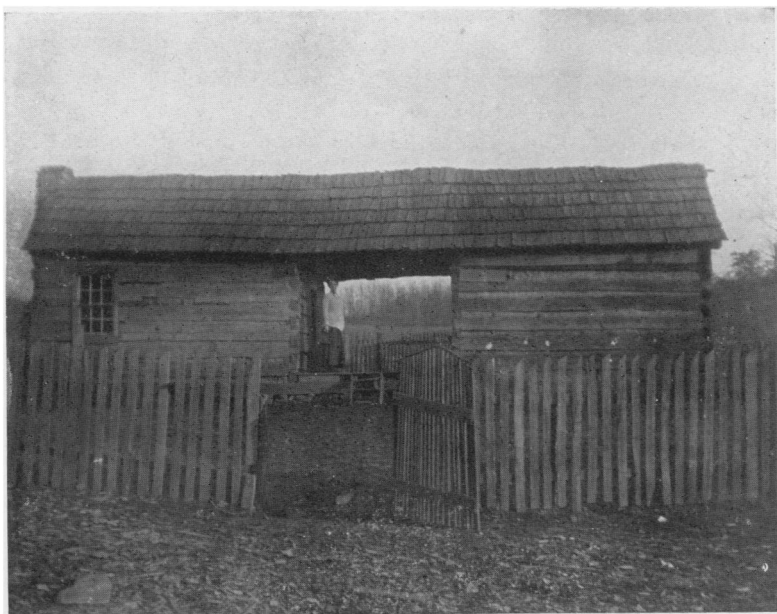
By FANNIE F. CLEMENT

NURSES who read the article by Dr. J. A. Stucky in the *Public Health Nurse Quarterly* of January, 1913, entitled "Another Field of Usefulness for the Graduate Nurse," must have realized that here in the Kentucky mountains is a field for public health workers such as would be difficult to find in any other section of the country outside our southern highlands.

Those unfamiliar with these far-away people may readily think that they are probably well contented, not wishing to be disturbed in their mode of living. Even when the truth about them is known it is hard to realize that in this beautiful sunshiny country, where cubic air space is not measured by inches and so much apportioned per family, that health conditions could approach and in some respects even exceed what we might find in the worst city districts. The people, to be sure, are heroic in their endurance of physical suffering, but they do not know what it means to be free from it and they are predestinarians. They have not learned the causes of their ills and that many of them may be prevented.

A visit to this country has all the novelty and charm of a foreign land to one unacquainted with mountain life. Leaving the railroad where city clothes are discarded for the kind which may be easily carried in a saddle-pocket, one may readily become close friends with the horse or mule which is to carry him over mountains and along valleys, over roads which beggar description. That any animal can manage four feet as these Kentucky horses do is marvelous. Travel for miles and miles may be in creek-beds of rock and fallen branches or in bridle paths over hills in some places too steep for riding. Then comes a smooth bit of road leading to a ford as there are no bridges. After heavy rains the larger streams are at times impassable, locking in the inhabitants for days at a time.

Stop at one of the cabins and ask to be directed to your destination and the answer will sound something like this, according to the names of creeks: go up "Crane," over "Shoulder-blade," down "Chicken Skin," across "Troublesome," up "Squabble," over "Hoop-fer Larry Hill" to "Rooster-bill." A certain church for which you might inquire is actually situated half way between "Kingdom-Come" and "Hell-fer-sartin."



A "DOUBLE BARREL" LOG CABIN. THE NURSE ABOUT TO MAKE HER VISIT.



ROAD OF SHALE, MADISON COUNTY, KENTUCKY.



**A FERRY ACROSS A BRANCH OF THE KENTUCKY RIVER,
PERRY COUNTY, KENTUCKY.**



FORDING A BRANCH OF THE KENTUCKY RIVER.

Isolated cabins seems to be scattered all through the mountains, the nearest neighbors oftentimes living several miles away. These cabins are usually built in the valleys and the settlements also are located in the lowlands enclosed by rough and steep hillsides. Precipitous slopes constitute the farm lands of many mountaineers. Small wonder that one had been a "leetle lame" ever since he fell out of his corn field. No matter how isolated the one or two-room cabin may be there always seems to be a well-trodden path leading to it through the woods. The mountain people are great walkers and in attending the annual and semi-annual clinics that are held in several mountain sections by doctors from Lexington, Kentucky, men, women and children walk from 10 to 25 and sometimes 45 miles. One elderly man suffering from trachoma for many years walked 70 miles to see the doctor, but arrived too late for the clinic.

A number of denominational schools located some distances apart among the mountains have accomplished most noteworthy results. They are in charge of remarkable men and women who have devoted their lives to these people who are cut off from the many avenues of education so plentiful in other parts of this country. In each school community is assembled a group of sincere teachers an increasing number of whom are native men and women endeavoring to bring within reach of the mountain boys and girls the knowledge that stimulates ambition and a desire for better living conditions. Agriculture seems to be the chief occupation in the mountains and more and more the introduction of agricultural experts as teachers in the schools is being emphasized.

Illiteracy is very common, but like parents everywhere many are anxious for their children to receive the education they did not have. The forty-five dollars required for one year's schooling is often obtained through great sacrifices by the family. Public schools do not as yet meet the educational needs.

Money is very scarce among the mountain people, and produce or labor is often used as a medium for exchange. A little money and a few eggs may pay the doctor's bill. Students in the denominational schools work for their living expenses. When clothing is sent down by the churches, in many instances the recipients pay something for what they receive. One community has what is known as the "Trade House," where such articles as come in "barrels" are on sale certain days during the week and the women have opportunity to sew and thus pay for what they wish to purchase. Perhaps one is led to question

how these people are going to pay for the services of a visiting nurse. Let this be answered by a mountaineer himself who said "Hits nurses we uns want mos'. We uns are po' folks but a whole heep more of us can pay fer a nurse than mos' folks thinks."

A small hospital has been established in connection with several of the schools in charge of a nurse who usually does visiting in the homes as well as caring for the students in the school. These nurses are a splendid type of womanhood, working with the most unselfish interest for the welfare of the people among whom they live. They are called upon in all sorts of troubles and their experiences are of an endless variety.

There is so much for the nurse to do that she would feel absolutely hopeless were it not for the fact that as already so many agencies are at work in this region she need not work single-handed. Sanitary engineers are trying to install properly constructed privies and to make provision for pure drinking water; a tuberculosis commission is combating this disease which here in the Kentucky mountains in 1912 had a higher mortality rate than in any other section of the United States. Physicians and government experts are allied against trachoma and are studying the possibilities of getting medical and surgical treatment to the mountaineers. A member of the United States Public Health Service has recently suggested the use of a hospital train to run through counties not already supplied with hospital facilities. The Rockefeller Sanitary Commission is working on the eradication of hook-worm and typhoid fever in the southern states. The Russel Sage Foundation has a Southern Highland Department interested in getting every possible large organization concerned with public welfare to include these mountains in their field of activity.

A situation worthy of consideration is that of the child in the Kentucky mountains deprived of one or both parents. It is hard to find a suitable home where orphans may be placed as the existence of such large families living on small means precludes the idea of an added responsibility and expense. It is almost impossible for a mother left alone to maintain her family even though she works in the field and utilizes every possibility of earning a sufficient income. Several of the mountain communities are considering the establishment of orphanages, but it would almost seem as though there must be other solutions to this problem. What nurses may do to prevent the increase of orphans covers a large area of their field for usefulness but the

welfare of those for whom such measures come too late should receive serious consideration.

The mountain doctor realizes the need and usefulness of the visiting nurse when he has learned her purpose. In one county-seat visited where there are six doctors there is not a single nurse. Only those in this community who can afford to send down the mountain to the cities ever receive the care of a graduate nurse. Good doctors also are scarce, woefully inadequate to the need. Mothers during childbirth are at the mercy of midwives. In one community of 150 persons, 6 mothers died this spring in four weeks of puerperal sepsis. The rural nurse may do much to discourage the employment of midwives, but she needs good physicians under whose care the welfare of these women may be assured.

The mountain nurse travels chiefly by mule or horseback. Native mountain women still ride side-saddle and are but gradually ceasing to hold up their hands in horror at the women who ride astride. The custom of riding "double" is common in the mountains, a wife seated behind "her man." If a nurse is called out at night she may be expected to ride "double" to get to her patient. If "Uncle Billy has a chillin' and a painin' roun' his heart" and the doctor is away the nurse must come at once.

One very common complaint is a "risin'." It may be in the throat or on the heel. In the language of one small boy whose father was afflicted with a carbuncle: "A cowbuckler is the festerinest risin' yeou could have."

Mountain conditions are so different in every way from what one is accustomed to find in other parts of this country that it is necessary to live in this region some time to be able to know the people and understand their philosophy of life. Farming implements must be made and adjusted to mountain farms, methods of agriculture to the climate and education suited to local needs. For this reason rural nurses that the Red Cross purposes to locate in the mountains will be given opportunities for preliminary experience going about with a nurse who already knows well the mountain ways of living.

The possibilities of turning the cabin into a desirable home with sanitary surroundings is not an idle thought and the Red Cross rural nurse living perhaps in her own model cabin will be able with the help of other interested agencies of whose co-operation she may be certain to bring about a better state of living conditions in this land of sun-bonnets and homespun.